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ABSTRACT

These guidelines are designed for use by persons working with the mentally retarded. They very briefly suggest how to deal with the library: discuss what you intend to do with the librarian, what privileges to request for the retarded, and what to do before going to the library. Several suggestions on what to do at the library are given and follow-up activities in the form of a library club discussion group are recommended. The goal is for the mentally retarded to be able to regularly use the public library successfully by themselves. (SJ)

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Guidelines

FOR INTRODUCING

MENTALLY RETARDED PERSONS

TO THE

PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Institutional Library Services
Washington State Library
Olympia, Washington 98501

LI 003 878

GUIDELINES FOR INTRODUCING MENTALLY
RETARDED PERSONS TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

I. Contact the Host Librarian First

Many people are now well acquainted with the abilities and disabilities of the mentally retarded. Discussing with the Librarian what you intend to do will help insure a good reception, and will give an opportunity for questions to be answered and problems and misunderstandings allayed.

II. Request the Following Privileges for the Mentally Retarded at the Library

A. Full adult borrowing privileges (if the individual is old enough to qualify for an adult library card).
B. No special limitations on materials borrowed. (You may be asked to countersign the individual's card.)
C. Sympathetic, but not patronizing, help in finding materials in the library in any department.
D. That these people not be identified as retarded, but be accepted as patrons and members of the community.

III. Before Going to the Library

A. If you are planning to take a group, rather than just one person, call the library and let them know you are coming.
B. Talk over with the person(s) you are taking what books he is interested in (engines, love stories, Indians, etc.) and if possible help him remember the names of a book or two he has enjoyed.
C. Encourage him to tell the Librarian how far he went in reading in school if he can do this comfortably.

(B and C above make it easier for the Librarian to find materials the person will enjoy using.)

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IV. At the Library

A. Give a general walk-through introduction to the library.

B. Help him request and fill out the application for a library card if help is needed.

C. You or the Librarian should explain borrowing privileges to him in direct, to-the-point vocabulary.

D. Show him the various areas where he can find materials:

1. The Children's Department. Here he will find materials with simple vocabulary, more illustrations, and larger print.
2. The Adult Department. Depending on the library, there may be a special adult education section having materials written with low-level vocabulary but of high interest and less childlike content. Other adult materials may be appealing to him, depending on his interests and abilities. Large-type books may be in this section also.
3. The Magazine Section. In both the Adult and Children's Departments. Most Libraries allow magazines to be checked out, but usually for a shorter period that books. Explain this to him.
4. The Record Section.(or other special sections). Records are very popular, and if he has a record player (check its condition first), he will want to check out records too. If tapes or other special collections are available, explain their use also.

E. Selecting Materials. If you have discussed with him his likes and interests beforehand, this process is easier (see III, B and C). Encourage him to select items he can read but don't press them on him. Let him select materials with a free hand.

IV. At the Library (continued)

F. Take him to the checkout counter. Show him how to check out books, magazines, or records. (Mostly, this will be giving his books along with his library card to the person behind the desk who will do all the work. Some Librarians require the patron to list the books being checked out. This procedure may require more help from you.)

1. Point out the due-date card placed in the book. Remind him to bring the book back on time and about overdue fines. Relate the due-date to a calendar.
2. Encourage him to take good care of the books, magazines and records he has checked out.

V. Special Library Programs

Some libraries have special film programs or discussion groups or other programs free to the public. Explain these and encourage participation in those programs the person would find interesting.

VI. After the Visit to the Library

It would be a pleasant experience to follow up visits to the library with discussions about what has been read. Perhaps a small group could get together as a "Library Club," especially if the sponsor has several people on his library-visiting problem. This encourages conversation, self-expression, evaluative reading, and thinking.

VII. Going to the Library on His Own

The ultimate goal of introducing the mentally retarded to a library is to interest and motivate them enough so they can make a visit a regular source of leisuretime activities and materials. You will want eventually, to wean them from having to go with a sponsor. After several visits with you, encourage bringing books back by themselves, or to go with friends. Help with any transportation problems. If they need to take a bus, help with schedules, etc., if necessary.